(b) whether the Prime Minister has decided to set up a dedicated non-lapsable fund for the purpose;

(c) if so, whether this fund called "Prathmik Shiksha Kosh" would be created and maintained by the Department of Elementary Education and Literacy similar to the Central Road Fund (CRF);

(d) if so, to what extent this fund has been utilized by his Ministry so far; and

(e) the steps taken so far to utilize this money for developing education?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ARJUN SINGH): (a) An Education Cess has been levied through the Finance (No.2) Act, 2004, "to fulfil the commitment of the Government to provide and finance universalized quality basic education."

(b) to (e) It has been decided to creat a "Prarambhik Shiksha Kosh" which will be a non-lapsable fund into which receipts of the Education Cess would be credited. Details in regard to the Kosh are being worked out. During 2004-05, after the imposition of the Education Cess, outlays for Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the Mid Day Meal Schemes were augmented to the extent of Rs. 2000 crores and Rs. 1222 crores respectively, and these additional outlays were fully utilized. During 2005-06, outlay for elementary education schemes has been more than doubled compared to Budget Estimates, 2004-05.

Thefts in cultural heritage

†*534. SHRI KALRAJ MISHRA: Will the Minister of CULTURE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware that incidents of theft in the cultural heritage is on the rise; and

(b) if so, what action Government have taken so far to protect the same?

THE MINISTER OF CULTURE (SHRI S. JAIPAL REDDY): (a) and (b) There is no information to indicate that the incidents of theft of heritage objects are on the rise.

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

To ensure protection of the ancient sculptures and artifacts in the nationally protected monuments, sites and museums, watch and ward staff have been deployed. Their strength has been supplemented by private security guards, State Police and Central Industrial Security Force. The Government is also considering the amendment of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act 1972 to cope up with illicit traffic in antiquities.

Distance Learning Programme in collaboration with foreign universities

*535. SHRI RAJKUMAR DHOOT: Will the Minister of HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that IGNOU has signed agreement with the foreign universities for carrying out distance learning programmes during 2005-06;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government have recognized the degrees to be awarded by IGNOU under such agreements; and

(d) if so, whether Government have issued necessary notification in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT (SHRI ARJUN SINGH): (a) and (b) According to the information furnished by Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), recently the Board of Management of IGNOU has approved the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with six foreign educational, institutions including universities. The details are given in the Statement. (See below)

(c) and (d) Under section 6 of the IGNOU Act, 1985, the University shall, in the the exercise of its powers, have jurisdiction over the whole of India and to the Study Centres outside India. According to the University all the Degrees/Diploma/Certificates awarded by IGNOU in collaboration' with foreign educational institutions are recognized in the respective foreign countries.

Statement

List of foreign Institutions approved for signing of MoU with IGNOU —

Capital Normal University, Beijing, China.